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## **HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD**

Historic Landmark Designation Case No. 07-03

### **The Morris Residence**

4001 Linnean Avenue, NW  
Square, Lot

Meeting Date: May 27, 2010  
Applicant(s): The D.C. Preservation League  
Owner: The Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Congo  
Affected ANC: ANC 3F

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After careful review and consideration, the staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Review Board designate the Morris Residence, 4001 Linnean Avenue, NW, as a landmark to be entered in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites. Staff further recommends that the nomination be forwarded to the National Register of Historic Places with a positive recommendation for listing at the local level and with a period of significance of 1939 to 1967.

### **Historical background**

The grand house at 4001 Linnean Avenue was built in 1939 for Edgar Morris, an appliance company owner and civic leader, and his wife, Beronica.

The building was designed by the architectural firm of (Irwin) Porter and (Joseph) Lockie. The men had worked for prominent Washington architect Waddy Wood, including on such projects as the Greystone mansion at 2325 Porter Street, NW (1913). With such a background and with Porter's social connections, they became known for designing large suburban homes in revival styles when they established their own office in 1922. In the late 1920s, this expertise was tapped by developer Waverly Taylor to assist with his Tudor-style "Foxall Village" subdivision. The architects also branched out into commercial remodelings and, in 1937, undertook alterations to the Edgar Morris Sales Company building at 712 13<sup>th</sup> Street, NW. The firm is also notable for the landmark 1932 Art Deco-style Brownley Confectionery Building at 1309 F Street, NW and for its extensive 1937 remodeling of the landmark United Mine Workers of America Building at 900 15th.

### **Evaluation**

The significance of the property is its architecture, namely as an excellent example of the "Jacobethan" style, a term coined in the 1930s to describe a revival of elements of English Renaissance, late Medieval, Tudor/Elizabethan and Jacobean buildings. As stated in the nomination, the style is characterized by "façade and exterior wall treatments including front gables, elaborate brick or stone work, turrets or towers, battlements and quoins; roof treatments that include Flemish gables, and tall decorative chimneys" and windows and doors with Tudor and Gothic arches and drip molds, lighter-colored stone trim (typically limestone), and leaded glass casements. This is a pretty accurate description of the Morris Residence, with its finely

carved limestone entrances, battlements, high-pitched roofs, massive decorative chimneys, projecting bays, and arcaded porch.<sup>1</sup>

The picturesque complexity of such a style could only be fully expressed in grand homes. Associated with the landed gentry of seventeenth-century England, Jacobethan was a style adopted across much of the United States after World War I, but in relatively few examples when compared to the contemporaneous “Colonial,” “Craftsman,” and other styles. Modest examples of Tudor occur even in speculative rows, but this more sprawling country-house expression is naturally more commonly found in elite suburban neighborhoods and on the estates of industrial magnates.

Although the Morris Residence is not nearly as grand a building or property as Akron, Ohio’s Stan Hywet Hall,<sup>2</sup> for instance, it intentionally has the feeling of a country estate, suited to Washington’s landed “gentry” of the time, and to the large Forest Hills parcels west of Rock Creek, carved out of the old Peirce estate. In that regard, it is similar to the landmark Shingle-style Owl’s Nest several blocks to the northwest—or to the similarly large, but less pretentious Cloverdale, also a landmark, which faces the Morris Residence across Tilden Street. The Morris house was recognized in its early years as a gracious mansion, appropriate for entertaining foreign diplomats, as Edgar Morris served as the State Department’s unofficial “Chief of Protocol for the District of Columbia” after he headed the Citizens’ Committee which hosted King and Queen of England in 1939. It has since become an embassy property itself.

As an excellent and fully developed local specimen of the Jacobethan or, more broadly, Tudor style applied to an appropriate setting of a small estate, the Morris Residence merits listing in the **D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites under Criterion D, “Architecture and Urbanism,”** as “embody[ing] the distinguishing characteristics of architectural styles... [and] expressions of... urban planning, siting, or design significant to the appearance and development of the District of Columbia...” For the same reason, it meets the **National Register of Historic Places Criterion C**, “embody[ing] the distinctive characteristics of a type [or] period... or that possess high artistic values....” It is one of the elite residential landmarks of suburban Forest Hills and is one of the most notable works of the architectural firm of Porter and Lockie.

The property’s **period of significance** should be considered to be period between 1939 and 1967, i.e., from the date of construction until the death of Edgar Morris, who commissioned it, representing the initial occupation of the home and the significant alterations that occurred during that time. As the property is located near Peirce Mill, just outside of Rock Creek Park, it possesses archaeological potential for both prehistoric resources, but it has not been surveyed and no sites have yet been identified on the property itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Although reflecting more the Morris’ interest in historic Spanish architecture, the structures and features of the landscape—such as wells, a planter, a shrine niche—demonstrate a similar level of quality and reference to the Medieval and post-Medieval periods.

<sup>2</sup> The home of Goodyear founder F.A. Seiberling.